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JCS PASS J-5/CDR S. WRIGHT

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

TUESDAY, MARCH 13, 2007

#### In Today's Papers

##### Next Iraq Meeting to be Held in Istanbul

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman, Yeni Safak and others report Turkey's special envoy to Iraq, Oguz Celikkol, said Monday there was broad agreement that an expanded gathering on Iraq could be held in Istanbul in April. With regard to opposition from Iran and Iraq to Istanbul as a location for the meeting, Celikkol said the two countries insisted on Baghdad, but the security situation in the Iraqi capital would not allow such a meeting. US Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad reportedly said the foreign ministers of Iraq's neighbors would decide whether to hold the next meeting in Istanbul. Papers cite the British Daily Telegraph as saying Secretary Rice would attend the follow up Iraq meeting if it's held in Istanbul. Ankara plans to invite Iraq's neighbors, the Arab states, the UN Security Council's five permanent members as well as the Group of Eight countries to the conference.

##### Editorial Commentary on Baghdad Conference

Sami Kohen observed in the mainstream daily Milliyet (3/13):

"Almost one hundred diplomats from 14 countries and three international organizations gathered together in Baghdad, where bombs were exploding every minute, to find a way to establish security and peace in Iraq. ... It surprised these many observers that despite the tense atmosphere, the meeting was still successful.

At this expanded conference even countries hostile to each other like the US and Iran, for the first time in many years, managed to sit around the same table. ... From Turkey's angle this conference was really successful because the basic principles decided at the meeting match Turkey's long held interests such as Iraq's integrity, national unity and independence. During the meeting, not only Iraq's neighbors but the UN and the superpowers also agreed on these interests. In other words, this united stance was a message against Iraq's division. The participants also agreed on countering terrorist groups in Iraq. ... One other important decision for Turkey was the agreement to continue the Iraq's neighbors'

conference. Turkish diplomacy has been exerting active efforts on this issue. The chaos and clashes in Iraq will not end with one conference, but at least the process started in Baghdad promises some hope..."

Haluk Ulman commented in the economic-political daily Dunya (3/13): "The highlight of the Baghdad conference was the US, who has been rejecting meeting with Iran and Syria for many years, agreeing to sit at the same table with them. ... It is not an easy task to find a solution to the problems in Iraq which have come as a result of the US invasion. Each state that participated at the Baghdad conference supported Iraq's territorial integrity. They all are against the division of Iraq and defended a single-state regime for the country. This is the main issue; the structure of the single state. Some countries support a Shiite regime, some Sunni and some Kurdish origin regimes. In order to prevent the establishment of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan, Turkey supports a unified Iraq or at least an Iraq with a powerful central authority. We should not be too hopeful, even if the second conference manages to convene that a helpful solution will come out of it."

**Asgari's Wife Asks Turks about Husband's Fate**  
Hurriyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report the wife, brother and three of the children of Ali Reza Asgari went to the Turkish embassy in Tehran to ask about Asgari's fate after the former Iranian deputy defense minister disappeared in Istanbul. Asgari's wife told the press her husband was on a business trip and vanished after arriving in Turkey on December 7. "He was very attached to his family, and had no problems with the Iranian government that would cause him to defect. He was abducted by the CIA and MOSSAD," she said. The Turkish, Arabic and Israeli media have suggested that Asgari defected to the west, probably with his family.

ANKARA 00000573 002 OF 002

**Erdogan Suffers Backpain, Delays Visits**  
All papers report Prime Minister Erdogan has cancelled a planned visit to Albania on Wednesday as well as a planned trip to Sirnak and Cizre in southeast Turkey on Tuesday because of a back problem, his office said. Erdogan, who has suffered from recurring hernia problems, rested at home and Monday's Council of Ministers convened under Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul.

**Crime Rates on Rise in Turkey**  
Cumhuriyet, reports Justice Ministry statistics show the number of reported crimes leapt to 785,000 in 2006, up from 229,000 in 1995. About half of the crimes are committed in Turkey's three largest cities, Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. More than 2,000 were killed and some 40,000 were wounded in attacks last year. There are currently 77,425 inmates in prisons, up from 49,512 in 2000, according to ministry data.

**TV Highlights**  
NTV, 7.00 A.M.

#### Domestic News

- The Istanbul forensic medicine institution said after examining Abdullah Ocalan's hair and blood samples that the PKK's imprisoned leader was not poisoned.
- The Turkish Anti-Terrorism Supreme Board will meet Tuesday under the chairmanship of Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul.
- The head of DTP branch in Gebze and 13 other suspects have been taken into custody for throwing a Molotov cocktail at a municipality bus in Istanbul.
- The bar associations in Ankara, Konya and Eskisehir have decided to suspend free services for suspects due to the government's failure to pay lawyers.
- Specialists say an EU decision to reduce greenhouse gas emissions was binding for Turkey.

## International News

- US State Department Deputy Spokesman Tom Casey said in response to a press question, "We do not wish to see any kind of military actions by Turkey into northern Iraq."
- Democrats in the House of Representatives have proposed legislation for a US troop pullout of Iraq by 2008.
- NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer has warned that a proposed US missile-defense system risks splitting the alliance.
- US Deputy Assistant Secretary Matt Bryza said Washington supported Turkey becoming a transit point to Europe for Azeri and Iraqi gas in order to provide a new source, breaking the dominance of Russia.
- Masked Palestinian gunmen abducted BBC reporter Alan Johnston from his car in Gaza City on Monday.

<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

WILSON